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Public Affairs Office
Fort Riley, KS 66442
Telephone (785) 239-2022 Fax (785) 239-2592
After Hours (785) 239-2222
Email: 19extinform@riley.army.mil
www.riley.army.mil



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT
Stephanie Perrin, Assistant Media Relations Officer

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'BLACK LIONS' FIRE BASIC WEAPONS TO REFINE INFANTRY SKILLS

By Amanda Kim Stairrett
Staff writer

Before starting to train their Soldiers, "Black Lions" leaders spent three days of master gunner training on Fort Riley this month to "reblue" themselves with the M-16 rifle, M-240 machine gun, M-249 squad automatic weapon and M 203 grenade launcher ranges.

"Reblue" refers to the process in which a rifle is reworked into topnotch shape for use.

The 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, leaders came to Fort Riley from a variety of places, including ROTC, recruiting and overseas assignments. To meld that variety of backgrounds, the training allowed the battalion to set standards and refamiliarize leaders on the weapons systems, said Maj. Jason Pardue, battalion operations officer.

The battalion was on ranges 34 and 19 Feb. 9, firing practice rounds from an M-203 grenade launcher.

The M-203 is mounted below the barrel of an M-16. The practice rounds are about the size of two golf balls and contain a neon orange powder to mark hits on targets located 100 to 300 yards away.

Lt. Col. Patrick Frank, battalion commander, said the master gunner training stirred up great competition among the leaders, and everyone had a great time on the range because everyone "loves" to shoot the M-203.

Of all the infantry weapons, battalions don't focus on the grenade launcher enough, Frank said.

"We haven't developed the accuracy we need yet," he said, referring to orange powder that wasn't on the targets.

Battalion Command Sgt. Maj. Clifford Dockter remembered when he first fired a grenade launcher as a team leader in 1981, well before some of the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team's new Soldiers were even born.

Back then it was known as an M-79 and wasn't mounted on a rifle. Instead, it was a separate weapon a Soldier had to sling over his back.

That experience was key to Dockter's M-203 accuracy, which Frank praised.

Company B's commander, Capt. Brian Ducote, and 1st Sgt. Gerald Cornell were among the Soldiers who spent the morning firing the M-203.

Each smiled when a round produced a satisfying orange puff of powder on the targets. Cornell said he liked firing the weapon.

"Firing anything is fun," he said, smiling.

Ducote said they would start training Soldiers in the upcoming weeks.